



## State of Connecticut

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Good afternoon Chairmen Stillman and Fleishmann, Ranking Members Boucher and Giuliano, and Members of the Education Committee. I am here to testify on Raised Bill 24, *An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness*.

On behalf of the House Republican Caucus, I would like to thank the Education Committee for raising the Governor's bill that proposes many changes to the state's education system that this Committee and the legislature have been discussing for a long time now so I'm heartened by the fact this year could be the year the legislature and the executive branch actually takes some real action.

This bill hopefully will act as the framework from which we all can work together to come up with a compromise that will make real changes that will enhance our education system and provide the best educational opportunities for our students. While we support many of the proposals set forth in the bill, we believe we cannot ignore our current fiscal environment and provide a false promise to allocate new spending toward any programs, education related or other if we truly can't afford it. We believe we should be reviewing our current education funding and reallocate these resources to support any new initiatives.

In addition to proposals contained in the bill, our caucus has interest in the following areas:

1. The Creation of a Career Cluster Curriculum
2. Student and Teacher Performance
3. Preschool Education
4. Summer Bridge Programs
5. Parental and School Choice
6. Unfunded Education Mandates

Our proposal to create a career cluster curriculum based on the United States' Department of Education's nationally-recognized 16 career clusters is one way to help close the achievement gap. The creation of a career cluster curriculum helps to foster relationships with students and teachers, puts students on the path toward a career of their choosing, and provides continual

support by educators, members of the business community, and most importantly, helps students maintain a clear focus on their future. Students who have clear career goals will be more likely to stay in school to achieve those goals, and providing them with real-world work experience through internships, they will learn to value and respect their education, and the opportunities given to them. All of these factors will help build a strong student body, and be one step among many to help close the achievement gap in this state.

Focusing next on student and teacher performance, our proposal is targeted first at students, by requiring students identified as "needs improvement" to take courses through the Connecticut Virtual Learning Consortium in order to help bring them up to speed with their peers. Students will be given the opportunity to take remedial courses online at their leisure, and will receive additional support by teachers in the classroom. It is essential to help students at the first sign of trouble, and not wait until the student is in danger of failing, or worse yet, graduates high school but lacks the skills to succeed in college level courses. With regard to teacher performance, we are encouraged that Bill 24 is approaching the topic of teacher tenure and evaluation. Our proposal includes several ways to reform the existing tenure and evaluation model, including insisting upon teacher effectiveness, and not seniority as a measure of success; restructuring teacher compensation to allow for career levels, with pay commensurate with level; encourage private sector contributions to support enhanced compensation options; re-design principal evaluations so that compensation and retention are based on student academic growth and overall performance; and revise certification provisions to permit reciprocity with other states.

SB 24 also touches on another one of the proposals offered by our Caucus, involving early childhood education. During a year in which the legislature is set to enact a comprehensive education reform package, we would be remiss if we did not also focus on early childhood education, and providing quality preschool education for our state's neediest citizens. We encourage the committee to include our proposal to expand the number of preschool seats for at-risk-four-year-olds. Young children who have been diagnosed with a developmental delay and are eligible for free or reduced lunch should be our priority in filling new preschool seats. In addition to providing quality preschool for these children, we must ensure that the level of care and education they receive is of the highest standard. By creating the opportunity for partnerships to be forged between local public school systems and private preschool providers with the intention of professionalizing existing preschool offerings, everyone involved will find that preschool programs will develop into the highest quality care ever provided. These partnerships will open the door for private and at-home preschool providers to enroll in in-service training programs to help them get expand their skills, and become more effective professionals.

I would also like to take this opportunity to address a major concern that is shared among members of the House Republicans with regard to Section 11 of the bill. Upon careful inspection of Section 11, it appears that several small towns in Connecticut will be penalized for spending their own dollars on education. According to the bill, thirty-one towns will be docked thousands of dollars by the State of Connecticut, simply for choosing to spend more on their students than the state average per pupil cost. In essence, we view this as forced regionalization, and strongly oppose this concept. We hope the committee will re-consider its inclusion in the final piece of legislation.

While I will not be available to testify before the Committee tomorrow regarding the financial and school choice aspects of the bill, I would be remiss if I did not mention the importance of expanding existing Summer Bridge programs by offering businesses tax credits for funding these programs; offering parents additional school choice options by allowing parents to transfer their students out of failing schools, and requiring the Department of Education to develop plans to convert failing schools to charter models; and as a final request, now is the time to evaluate and review all unfunded education mandates, and either repeal them entirely, or put a moratorium on as many as possible in an attempt to provide flexibility and time to education our students. I will be submitting testimony for the Committee's review tomorrow addressing these and other issues related to the bill changes to the ECS formula.

Again, the House Republican Caucus supports many of the concepts in this bill. And we stand ready to work with members of the Committee, the legislature and the Governor's Office to expand these important opportunities and reforms to help all of our students and teachers succeed.

Thank You